

**South Dakota National Guard**  
**Public Affairs Office**  
2823 West Main St.  
Rapid City, S.D. 57702

Phone 605-737-6721  
E-mail PAO@sd.ngb.army.mil

July 24, 2008  
PAO 07-24-08

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

## Women reaching to top ranks in South Dakota National Guard

*By Jasper DesLauriers*

RAPID CITY, S.D. – RESPONSIBILITY and HISTORY. Those two words best describe last May's opening formation for Joint Forces Headquarters at Camp Rapid.

That's when Diann Deyo proudly took her position in front of the 193-member unit and stepped into history as the first women in the South Dakota National Guard to become a first sergeant.

She now becomes responsible for the accountability and welfare of her Soldiers and will help guide her unit in the areas of personnel, training, logistics and unit readiness.

"We can do just about anything a man can," said Deyo, who works full-time as a management analyst for the National Guard's maintenance office. "When I started, a woman had to be in the administrative field."

Deyo is one of about 459 women currently serving in the South Dakota Guard. Overall, women now represent about 13.6 percent of its total 3,360 members. As of July, nearly half of the women hold leadership positions ranked E-5 and above - 47 officers and 159 noncommissioned officers.

Deyo isn't alone when talking about recent 'firsts' for SDNG women over the past 10 years.

In the officer ranks, Col. Ruth Christopherson, rural Garretson, is currently serving as the first female to hold the position of chief of staff for the Air National Guard in Sioux Falls.

Nearly a decade ago, Nancy Wetherill, Rapid City, became the first female to achieve the rank of full colonel, and later became commander of the 109th Engineer Group and led the units of Task Force Coyote during a one-year tour in Afghanistan.

In 2002, Darla Crown, of Rapid City, became the first female to be promoted to Chief Warrant Officer Five, a relatively new rank for top warrant officers that was establishment 17 years ago.

And just two years ago, Kris Tvinnereim, Webster, was selected as the first sergeant major. She has worked in personnel and administration for her entire 34-year career.

Despite the recent promotions, many women in the ranks are left wondering why it has taken so long for females to gain a bit of equity in what has been a 'male-dominated' force.

"It takes an entire career for anyone, male or female, to reach these high-level ranks – 20 to 30 years," said Maj. Deb Bartunek, deputy human resource officer who has worked equal opportunity issues works over the years.

"These women got in at the beginning and worked hard to get to the top," she said. "This is just the beginning and we should be seeing more women in leadership positions in the future."

Despite the origins of the SDNG dating back more than 146 years, women were not allowed to enlist until the early 1970's or about the same time the military moved forward with its 'all volunteer' force.

It was not until September 1971 that National Guard Bureau announced that prior service women, those not requiring basic or military skills training, could be enlisted in the ARNG.

Having served in the Women's Army Corps (1966-1967), Faulkton native Susan Rodriguez was the first enlisted female to join the SDNG when she joined in 1971. She serve 33 years and retired as a lieutenant colonel in 2005.

The authority to enlist new, non-prior service, recruits into the Army Guard was issued in May 1972. Within six years, the number of women in the ARNG climbed to nearly 13,353 nationwide.

Although women are prevented from direct combat missions, given the support roles they now play, combined with the fluid nature of modern war, it's inevitable that some women will find themselves under fire.

Hundreds of other National Guard women experienced combat during Operation Desert Storm in 1991. Many of these women were in direct combat support roles and performed their missions as well as their male counterparts and the same is true for women serving today in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Now, women can serve in 2,825 – three-fourths – of the total positions of the SDARNG. These jobs include maintenance, engineering, transportation, supply, administration, medical, communication, security, logistics and public affairs.

Each joined for different reasons:

Colonel Ruth Christopherson enlisted in the South Dakota Air National Guard in 1978 and received her commission as an officer in 1987. She is now the Chief of Staff in headquarters at the air base in Sioux Falls.

Both she and her husband, Lt. Col. Reid Christopherson, have made a big impact on the Air Guard since both joined in the 70's and their son, Nathan, served in Iraq with the SDARNG Company B, 109th Medical Battalion.

She admits women in the Guard weren't always so common.

Christopherson says, "You'd go to another base, and it's like, oh, you're a woman. If you were in uniform, the older members would always question it."

Colonel Christopherson says gender aside, she has a real passion for what she does, and she says that's the most important thing.

Christopherson says, "Hopefully, I have inspired others."

She works as the managing director for the Wholesale Lending Channel Operations Division for CitiMortgage, headquartered in O'Fallon, Mo.

Chief Warrant Officer Five Darla Crown joined the active-duty Army 35 years ago, right out of high school, for educational benefits and the opportunity to travel. After her three year commitment, she joined the Guard while going to college.

Crown's career is filled with important milestones and memories and the most significant being promoted to Chief Warrant Officer 5.

Crown said being a female in the military has never been an issue for her to achieve what she wanted to accomplish.

"I have never bought into that whole gender difference issue," said Crown. "I have never experienced any obstacles in regard to what I wanted to accomplish."

Colonel Nancy Wetherill grew up in the military as her father completed a career in the Air Force. She joined the 842nd Engineer Company in 1974 while attending Black Hills State University.

Her recent deployment to Afghanistan was "no doubt" her proudest moment.

“My greatest accomplishment was leading a brigade combined task force of engineers in support of Operation Enduring Freedom,” said Wetherill.

Combined Task Force Coyote cleared mines, placed thousands of cubic yards of concrete for airfield ramps, built two of the largest detainee facilities, built hundreds of tent platforms for troops, and constructed 27 miles of a 74 mile road through the heart of Taliban country.

Wetherill’s advice to young women considering joining is to simply do their best.

“Know your job, do it better than any one else,” said Wetherill. “Set your standards high, have passion for your position, and don't forgo your integrity to get ahead.”

Sergeant Maj. Kris Tvinnereim did not join the Guard in a traditional manner. Her husband was in the Guard when she started working for the Webster National Guard unit as a civilian temporary technician in 1974. At the time, she was eight months pregnant and enjoyed her work so much that she decided to enlist in July of 1975.

“There is absolutely more opportunity for women now,” said Tvinnereim. “When I first started, women were only in the medical or administration fields.”

Tvinnereim said her job is gratifying because of others in the organization.

“Being a part of the Guard has been an extremely rewarding experience because of the quality of the people you work with,” said Tvinnereim, who has served for 33 years. “There is a great opportunity to build relationships with people.”

First Sgt. Deyo has served in the SDNG for 27 years. She joined the Guard to help pay for the educational costs of obtaining an associates degree in business.

Deyo said that she feels the Guard has given her great opportunities and that she does not feel gender plays a role in the successes or failures of a Soldier.

“Everyone has to work hard to get where they are going,” said Deyo. “If they don’t, they won’t get anywhere, no matter if they are a male or female.”

The Guard has given Deyo the chance to excel and accomplish important goals. “As the first sergeant, I’m going to be able to help the unit accomplish their future missions,” said Deyo. “I simply enjoy my job and taking care of people.”



Photo cutline: In order from left to right: Chief Warrant Officer Five Darla Crown, Col. Nancy Wetherill, Sgt. Maj. Kris Tvinnereim and 1st Sgt. Diann Deyo all hold leadership positions in the South Dakota National Guard. (National Guard Photo by 1st Sgt. Donald Matthews) (RELEASED)

Link to photo: <https://sdguard.ngb.army.mil/released/080606-A-5701M.jpg>